

Washington, DC - Rep. Linda Sánchez, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, discussed healthcare reform during a hearing today with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. Rep. Sánchez expressed concerns and offered to work with Secretary Sebelius to construct a plan that can help the unemployed and disconnected to access real healthcare.

“Those who are not satisfied with the current system include not only those who do not get coverage through their workplace, but also those who lose coverage when they lose a job,” said Rep. Sánchez. “A constituent recently wrote me about the struggles she has gone through as a cancer patient after losing her job and the health insurance that went with it. While COBRA coverage exists, the reality is that most unemployed people cannot afford it.”

The U.S. spends twice as much per person for health care as any other country in the world, and yet continues to lag behind other countries in terms of coverage and quality. There are nearly 47 million uninsured people in America, and millions more have inadequate coverage. The U.S. has lower life expectancy rates than all other industrialized countries, including Japan, Germany, Australia and Switzerland. Lack of health insurance coverage, rising costs and lower quality are intimately intertwined.

Rep. Linda Sánchez asked, “Madame Secretary, how we might reform the system so that losing a job does not mean losing high quality, affordable coverage, even if we retain our current employer-based system? For example, how might the newly unemployed access the health insurance “exchange” to retain or obtain health insurance?”

Secretary Sebelius responded to Rep. Sánchez that she shared her concerns about stabilization of our current healthcare system. Sebelius also mentioned the Recovery Act, recently passed by Congress and signed into law by the President, recognized the shortcomings of the current system and provided subsidies to help newly unemployed individuals afford COBRA health coverage. The Secretary indicated that in the future, she hopes to continue this coverage in an exchange program.

In a statement submitted for the record, Sánchez added: “I am very concerned about the uninsured. I’d like to work with Secretary Sebelius to construct a plan that can help the disconnected to access real healthcare-to manage their chronic conditions and get preventive treatments; a plan that doesn’t bankrupt hospitals, drive away doctors with inadequate reimbursement rates, or leave struggling families without quality care.”

President Obama has said that health care reform is both a moral and fiscal imperative. His principles for reform and the plan he proposed during the campaign envision a uniquely American system that assures affordable, quality health care for all Americans.

This hearing was the first post-confirmation hearing before the Congress for Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.